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A LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND WHAT IT COULD DO

BY SIR OLIVER LODGE

A PACT of Nations exists today, called into being in defence of humanity, but called into being too late to avert the awful consequences of rampant militarism combined with premature pacifism and *laissez faire*.

The question before us is, shall such a pact or league of nations be continued and permanently organized and equipped so that it may exercise its powers promptly and decisively before another era of violence and destruction has time to develop?—its duty being to curb any Power which sets itself stealthily to undermine the peace of the world, or selfishly to pursue a policy of aggrandizement at the expense of smaller peoples.

The weapons first to be used would be civil ones. Commercial interchange throughout the league should be free, no exclusion of goods need be practised among the members. But an offender might be punished first by a hostile tariff, then by a boycott. As to what nations should be admitted to the league, let the present Allies begin, and let questions of future admission be relegated to the future when more information will be available and we shall realize more clearly how we stand. In the long run it is to be hoped that all will be included, but the time is not yet. The less talked on this head in the present state of ignorance the better.

Incidentally such a brotherhood of free nations may do much for the world in various ways, and it would do well to speak most of these and keep its attention upon them, but its first and primary though often silent aim is that for which it has even now been called into being, the suppression of international wrong and robbery, insistence on fulfilment of

unrepealed treaties and maintenance of the supremacy of International Law. Only in the future it must act betimes, before any catastrophe has happened; and it must be so strong that no nation could think of challenging its decisions.

Towards making effective this police force every citizen should be trained, each in his or her appropriate work. There should be no professional army, nor any set of men whose career depends upon successful fighting. War should come, if it come at all, as an interruption to useful pursuits, a call like that of fire or storm, when everyone has been drilled to take his appointed place and to do his pre-appointed work. The discipline would be healthy, the encroachment on time but small, and the need for its employment rare.

A civilian army should be no menace, any more than a police force is a menace. The real menace to civilization is destructive machinery, the enslavement of mankind by inhuman instruments of destruction. So the production of these should be controlled: else will the energy and invention and skill of mankind be devoted with ever increasing ardor to devices of inflicting wholesale death. Already the resources of civilization have been bitterly abused, and scientific research prostituted to unholy ends. If this goes on there will be no end to the improvement of means of destruction, until the planet itself becomes unsafe. Some day the secrets of atomic energy may be unlocked, and vast stores become available. If all that new power is used for beneficent ends, well; but if in the interests of crime and brutality, it will be intolerable. What we have seen so far would be but the beginning, and no man can foresee the end. People seem to think that what has not been discovered can never be. Surely experience has taught us more than that. There is literally no end to the progress of discovery, and if a nation seeks to turn that power into weapons of destruction it must be dealt with before the danger has become too great.

But our hope is better than that. If only this war can end in such a way as to show that what had succeeded only too well as Prussianism has now at length proved an abject and costly failure, if we can only show that the system which overran Denmark, when England was too selfish or too lazy to oppose it, that which overran Austria and conquered France,—if we can show that this devilishly aggressive spirit has had its day and must cease to be, if we can clearly write failure as well as distress upon its tomb,—then there is hope

that all humanity may once more awaken from its evil dream and realize that not by such aid is even earthly glory to be attained. But we must not stop till the lesson is thoroughly learnt: any inscription short of FAILURE would be a ghastly mistake. The experiment can never be tried under better conditions. Failure could not be attributed to fault in government or army, all was well planned, everything perfect,—except—the belief on which the whole was founded. Nothing is more deadly than wrong belief; as the Athanasian creed says, if you believe wrongly you are damned. It is this secular domination which is now entrusted to the allied nations to inflict, so that the poor victims of devilry may waken from their evil dream and become worthy co-workers in the cause of good once more.

That effort after world-domination inevitably brings downfall, and that the fruits of a lust to conquer the world is a bitter and ignominious defeat—that is the lesson that must be driven home, else will all our work have to be done again. But once this lesson is driven thoroughly home, with a strong and righteous indignation and with no misguided weakness or softheartedness for a temporarily brutalized and case-hardened foe, then indeed there may be hope that the tradition will sink into their bones and may become a universal heritage, so that hereafter a league of nations may seldom need to use actual force in the exercise of its police functions. Its moral power will be enough; and it can turn its attention to those other matters in which in its corporate capacity it will find itself able to serve mankind.

For incidentally such a federation or brotherhood of free states may do much towards promoting many higher aspirations. The exclusion and suppression of selfishness will be its primary aim; all its acts must aim at the good of the whole. This war has shown that such an aim is no imaginary or utopian possibility. Sacrifice for the good of the whole has become a reality. It has been accepted by individuals, and by nations also. The fact is a profoundly hopeful one. Four years ago it would not have seemed possible.

The special virtue of war is the strenuous and unselfish energy which it evokes: can we learn to continue something like the same spirit into the work of peace? There is plenty to be done, any number of difficulties to overcome, much good work to be accomplished; and if only the nations could devote themselves vigorously to these we should make a real

advance towards a millennium which nothing but wrong-headedness and supineness on the part of humanity seems to render inaccessible.

So long as a league of nations thinks only of coercion and suppression it will encounter difficulties; those who think of this side alone regard the ideal as impossible. But what it must chiefly exercise its energies on are the corporate works of peace. Let it turn its chief attention to these, let its police agency be tacit and understood, not flaunted, but let it take all world-wide enterprises under its protective and helpful jurisdiction. The scientific world has already shown the way to an intelligent internationalism in science. In the arts there are no national boundaries. This must spread to commerce also, and then to politics; until gradually we approach the ideal—the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World.

OLIVER LODGE.